

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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R 201010Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7023

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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AMEMBASSY RANGOON

COMUSMACTHAI

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1231

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, EMIN, TH

SUBJECT: TIN: MORE ON SMUGGLING

REF: A) BANGKOK 461 B) LONDON 18959 C) LONDON 19131

D) SONGKHLA 204 REPEATED AS BANGKOK 23973

1. BANGKOK "PTST" JAN 20 QUOTED DAMRI NOIMANEE, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFSHORE MINING ORGANIZATION, AS SAYING THREATS FROM ILLEGAL MINERS HAVE STALLED THE SIGNING OF OPERATING CONTRACTS BETWEEN OMO ON ONE HAND AND BILLITON AND AO KHAM TIN CO. ON THE OTHER. ACCORDING REPORT, FIRMS ARE RELUCTANT TO SIGN CONTRACTS WITH OMO BECAUSE OF LACK OF SECURITY IN AREA.

2. "POST" QUOTED DAMRI, WHO RECENTLY RETURNED FROM INSPECTION TRIP TO MINING AREAS, AS SAYING THAT NUMBER OF ILLEGAL MINERS HAS INCREASED CONSIDERABLY AND SMUGGLING ACTIVITIES ARE RIFE. "IF THE CURRENT SITUATION CONTINUES WE CAN NEVER RESUME MINING LEGALLY," DAMRI REPORTEDLY TOLD "POST".

3. PAT LYONS, UNION CARBIDE OFFICIAL SECONDED TO BILLITON
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FOR THREE-MONTH TRANSITION PERIOD, CONFIRMS OMO-BILLITON

HAVING DIFFICULTY REACHING AGREEMENT ON FINAL DRAFT OF MANAGEMENT CONTRACT, BUT ASSERTS PROBLEM STEMS FROM FACT THAT OMO OFFICIALS FEAR CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BACK THEM UP SHOULD PROPOSED AGREEMENT COME UNDER FIRE FROM STUDENTS OR OTHER GROUPS.

4. IN REGARD SMUGGLING, LYONS CONFIRMS THAT "ILLEGAL" OFFSHORE MINING (BY CREWS SAN RTG PERMITS), SOME OF IT BY "VERY LARGE VESSELS", HAS INCREASED MARKEDLY OVER 1974-1975 SEASON, AND PARTICULARLY SINCE ADVENT OF GOOD WEATHER AND CALM SEAS FIRST WEEK IN DECEMBER. LYONS SAID "ALMOST ALL" ORE WON IN SUCH OPERATIONS IS SMUGGLED TO PENANG, UNDER MANIFESTS SHOWING BURMESE ORIGIN, IN FIVE AND TEN-TON LOTS, BY THAI FISHING BOATS. FACT THAT SMUGGLERS DO NOT PAY ROYALTY OF 25 PERCENT OF VALUE TO RTG PROVIDES THEM ADEQUATE PROFIT MARGIN TO PAY FOR LOCAL "PROTECTION" AND FOR BRIBES TO COVER MOVEMENT OF ORES, ACCORDING LYONS. LYONS UNDERSTANDS RTG WILL COME UNDER "HEAVY BARRAGE" FROM OTHER INTERNATIONAL TIN COUNCIL MEMBERS IN FEBRUARY MEETING IN LONDON.

5. LYONS SAID BILLITON OFFICIALS REMAIN HOPEFUL THEY CAN CONCLUDE CONTRACT AND RESUME OPERATIONS DURING CURRENT SEASON, BUT OPINED PRIVATELY THAT IF SMUGGLERS, WHO ARE ALREADY IN POSSESSION OF ORE BEDS, AND STUDENTS RAISE PUBLIC OUTCRY OF "FOREIGN EXPLOITATION AT EXPENSE OF THAIS," RTG MIGHT WELL CALL HALT TO BILLITON'S OPERATIONS FOR REMAINDER OF THIS MINING SEASON (WHICH LASTS UNTIL MID-APRIL MONSOON ON ADAMAN SEA SIDE).
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